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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

This paper is a short conceptual article which discusses the Biblical perspectives to environmental education. This is a study of the major areas in the light of the Church, in its conviction for Environmental education. The Church for salvation also includes the creation or the environment, through it defined stage, and is fully responsible for the environmental conditions, and it must provide redemptive measures for it. It is the immediate task of the Biblical philosophy of education, to establish the truth of the world, in order for Church to effectively discharge its responsibilities; fundamental steps must be taken to control the psycho-ecological basis of the religion founded in the Bible. Thus, Church can motivate people to work for positive social change through Biblical based environmental education which can be guided towards the Christo-centric environmental education.

Keywords: Authority, Creation, Steward, Redemption, Environmental Education.

INTRODUCTION

The readers of the Bible will undoubtedly realize and can determine that the Bible is a book of Creation, ideas, anthropology, history, political rights, and Ecology, and so on, if prospectively interpreted seeking the Mind of God, which are enshrined in the Bible and mandated man's responsibility to creation by God's as its steward on earth. As Genesis 2:v15 tells us that *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it,"* also in Genesis 1:v28,*"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the*

air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth", while here *subdue* does not reflects suppression but rather to manage its successive growth and development for the very survival and existence of man. Authorized stewardship is not for domination but for dominion, as apostle Paul wrote *'Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful'* (1 Corinthians 4:2), faithful in all Gods appointments and not exploitation, as humanity stands at the summit of all creation.

As everything God made was made to be very good (Genesis 1) and human beings have a special role in Creation, therefore human life should not be separated from either God or the rest of Creation as the first man's body was made "*from the dust of the ground*" but God "*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*" (Genesis 2:v7). Like Adam and Eve, we are created to live together and be members of creation. Therefore, we shouldn't attempt to detach our responsibility to the environment. More directly, our general misunderstanding is based on a reading and interpretation of the Bible, due to our limited ecological understanding and responses which are influenced by the constrained religious beliefs we hold.

Thus hermeneutical opportunity is there, for hundreds of phrases are available in the Bible to keep the earth healthy, to which man can be the good steward or God's manager of the creation, while requesting Him to give us understanding to understand HIS mind, guided by the Holy Spirit for the better dissemination of the divine knowledge through various policies, which primarily starts from the Christian environmental education. Different contemporary ideas and perspectives can be drawn out from the Bible, if we let His comprehension be allowed to flow freely in us while trying not to limit ourselves to comprehend our understanding. But, with the aggregated environmental problems I believe that the creation righteousness is still not completely ruined. Therefore, Christianity can play a historical role in imparting Biblical based environmental education.

AUTHORITY

For smooth and successful propagation of information interpreted from the Bible requires a formal divine authority, therefore few important Biblical authorities are discussed which are consented for the path to the salvation of entire creation through its philosophy.

The Bible clearly declares many times that God is the Creator (e.g., Genesis 1 & 2) and created man in his own image, Genesis 1:v26a says that "*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: ....*" therefore, no other part of creation has the dignity of being in God's image and likeness. So God created man in his own image, and gave all authority to manage the creation. But a different command of how humans should relate to the world is given in the Genesis 1:v26b & 28 and Genesis 2:v15, "*....let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that move upon the earth*" (Genesis 1:v26b) while Genesis 1:v28 also gave full right to be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (*restore*) the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing upon the earth. Thus the authority for restoration (*replenish*) of the creation is the condition to be fruitful and multiply, and to subdue (*manage*) it, but not subjugation. And in second Genesis, "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden to till it and keep it*" (Genesis 2:v15). This suggests that humans do not own the garden; the creation, but that creation belongs to God and humans are its custodians.

In Genesis 9 God uses the word 'Covenant' seven times to emphasize and sustain his Holy agreement or trust with all the creation, "*I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth*", (Genesis 9:v13). It's the promise between God and whole creation, and agreement is the authority to fulfill what was agreed upon and was same authority given to Noah twice in the same

chapter, as was given to first humans in Genesis 1 & 2, *"And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"* (Genesis 9: v1 & 7). Hence, God had authorized Noah and his generations after the great flood to restore everything on the earth as his first creation model while getting pleasure from it.

The plan to appoint man therefore, as the steward or manager was from the beginning itself; as man were created in His image with his spirit blown into them; thus Adam's descendents are all both earthly and heavenly, and it was his will to provide man the divine mandate to look after the God's created earth and be a faithful steward, for He wanted to maintain and retain everything 'good', which, and how he had created, Genesis 1:v31a *"God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good."*

Also, Jesus' Great Commission to his eleven disciples, in Mark 16:v15 said *"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation* (some translation-'*creature*')".' This reflects that the direct authority was given to all the believers to be a torchbearer and be an accountable steward for the management of his property. So, we have the guaranteed authority and a duty of fulfillment through rigorous preaching about the God created earth, and the inevitable environmental problems, which has now become imperative for us is forcing the whole of Christianity to be educated about the planet in peril through comprehensive Biblical based environmental education.

PREACH THE WORD

God the Creator:

God created the universe, and is its ultimate Owner. "*The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers"* (Psalm

24:v1-2). David praises God in 1 Chronicles 29:v11, "*O LORD…… for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD,….".* The Bible, from the beginning teaches that God is the Creator of the universe and everything in it. This is the first Christian teaching about Creation, and it is the foundation on which every Christian environmental teaching must stands for. Also in the Gospel of John 1:v1-4 "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*" And Paul in letter to Hebrews 1:v10 says that, *"….. Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands..".* Thus, Creation belongs to God, therefore we as the responsible stewards, manager, caretaker, etc., must faithfully and diligently supervise what is His and must acknowledge that "God" "the Creator has Created Creation."

Responsible Steward:

"We are to be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity. Our mortality and our weakness of judgment together warn us not to take irreversible actions with what we choose to regard as our property during our brief stay on this earth. We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation, we are only stewards of the common heritage." (The Common Declaration by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew-2002). "*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it."*(Genesis 2:v15). "*Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion ……. upon the earth.' '*God then blessed them, and God said to them *'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over…… every living thing that moves upon the earth.'* (Genesis 1:v26 & v28). As we were

made in the image and likeness of God Himself, humanity has far more authority over the rest of the planet than any other species. The only choice we have is how we chose to exercise this right. The dominion in itself is morally neutral and not same as 'domination' which is equal to 'exploitation'. Will we exercise our dominion over the earth with responsibility and kindness, like God exercises dominion in relationship to us? Or will our dominion will turn to domination and be more selfish, full of greed, unlimited wants and destruction? The choice is up to us. We must now recognize that our God given job description is to take-care of the earth with full responsibility and compassion.

The Holy Spirit Sustains:

Did you ever wonder what makes the earth functions as remarkably as it does and what controls and holds the universe and its mechanism? Christians can see this as the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as it does at the beginning of creation, '*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the water'* (Genesis 1:v2). '*Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (the spirit); and the man became a living being'* (Genesis 2:v7). This inspiration and pouring of God's spirit is the first basis behind the emergence and development of all life forms. Thus, the Spirit is positioned everywhere within and outside the structure of Creation, creating the foundation, the natural laws, on which everything rests whether visible and invisible.

The Psalmist also in the concluding statement makes the same proclamation (Psalm 104:v30), *'When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground'*, therefore the Spirit gives life to Creation, and thrust its creativity forward. Meaning, the Spirit urges us to behave towards Creation as in Galatians, Paul writes that *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit"*

(Galatians 5:v25) in all thing. These words guide us for our behavioral change towards our neighbor; other people and indeed the environment, as *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:v22 & v23). Consequence is that we must now increasingly recognize application to our treatment these fruits of spirit and must raise this important questions in our congregations as it is important for churches to take them seriously as they seek to shape their members' personality and survival.

Christian communities and leaders across must shared these commitments to fight environmental injustice and responsibly accept the God's stewardship for healing and managing the Earth. It would be unthinkable for Christian communities to abandon these commitments. They are not optional or marginal aspects of our faith but an obligation to Jesus. Jesus calls us to the faith that brings life not only to ourselves but to all of creation, particularly environment. But no matter how difficult it may be, it is clear that this is the right thing to do by allowing the spirit to work through us and guide us to solve the problem.

Creation Redemption:

*"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his (*Jesus*) cross."*(Colossians 1:v15-20). "*In (Jesus) whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins*" (Colossians 1:v14), the sins of environmental injustice to his creation which he had gracefully handed over to us in trust. But he sacrificed himself on the cross for our sins to be redeemed; "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son …"* (John 3:v16), and we shall be redeemed only if we faithfully accept our misgiving and greediness, and return to him with

submissiveness and humility. In Matthew 22:v37 *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."* This first and Greatest Commandment is the path we can follow to get our redemption that if we love him with all our heart, soul and mind we will obey all his commandment and be like him, having no greed for worldly thing, no trespassing and moulding ourselves, and having outlook of his characters. As such He can be revealed to us, but must take the task genuinely and strategically among the people providing full knowledge about been responsible caretaker.

Not only human but the whole creation requires redemption in him, as Jesus is the Savior and the Redeemer of all things. In Romans 8 *the future glory*, there is the fall of human-kind and creation as a whole due to our false pride and will-fully rebellion against God with subjected to mismanagement of his creation. *"For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies"* (Romans 8:v19-23). It's not just us whose lives are broken and damaged morally and spiritually, as Paul says it is the whole of creation that has been subjected to futility and groaning in travail while waiting for redemption of the world which can only be accomplished though our Lord Jesus Christ. The point here is that as Christians, being instrument we are called to participate with Him morally and spiritually for the healing, restoring, and in the redeeming of the Creation by Him.

CONCLUSION

Thus, environmental education with the Christian perspective is an ideal way to reimburse and foster all the environmental injustice we have committed. Willful pollution of the environment is not only a human error; but it is also a moral evil. The most important perspective to successful Biblical based environmental education, be positively founded on the extraction of ideas from the Bible by understanding the mind of God and determines its values with humility while interpreting every word. We must glorify and celebrate the un-understandable qualities of God while our heart should completely be immersed in prayer of adoration for all that he had created.

Let us have greatest pleasure to be appointed as his servant to look after his pasture, and promise ourselves to be faithful and responsible stewards and offer obligable creation to God. We the believers have to acknowledge our sins, express sorrow for them and seek forgiveness, together with a promise to amend our sinful lives, of greed, prejudice, corruption, immortality, etc. Thus, the genuine repentance is the need of the hour, as rightly declared by Pope Francis and Patriach Bartholomew (Joint Declaration, 2014) *"Therefore, we acknowledge in repentance the wrongful mistreatment of our planet, which is tantamount to sin before the eyes of God. We reaffirm our responsibility and obligation to foster a sense of humility and moderation so that all may feel the need to respect creation and to safeguard it with care",* and by the Evangelical Environmental Network (1994), *"Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work."* Therefore, we have failed in our spiritual environmental duties and the consequence of that failure is not only in the material dimension but even spirituality. Church, the social Changer can be a game changer once more for concrete development

towards the Environmental education, by taking the advantage of having wide platform it has, it can create significant and desirable outcome for leading the course as an elite environmental educator.

Humanity has a divinely-given responsibility for caring for creation, of protecting and fostering creation, as creation's steward. It's time to concentrate on our responsibility diligently before God. As Pope Benedict XVI rightly says that, "*When 'human ecology' is respected within society, environmental ecology also benefits.*" (*Caritas in Veritate 51*). Creation care is thus both a spiritual duty and a spiritual opportunity and at the end, all things and action must leads towards the Christo-centric environmental education.

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